

## **A FATHER'S DELIGHT**

**(Phil 2:12-18                      July 29, 2001)**

Chances are that sometime tomorrow I will get a phone call. It will be from Scott Hoskins. And it will be a Scott I will have never heard before. He will tell me about the birth of a baby that to him has to be the cutest little tyke ever born.

I've had a few of these phone calls. I know how they go. He will tell me whether the baby is a boy or a girl. He will give me the full name, probably twice – and make sure I spell it right. Then I will get all the details – weight, length – who the baby looks like.

By next Sunday we will either have the baby to look at or pictures of the baby to oohh over.

I was hoping that by this morning I would have a name, but I don't. So while I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet – I need a name and sex for this story – so I will assume that the phone call tells me of the birth of little James Hoskins.

Imagine the scene twenty-six years from now. It is his wedding day.

And on that day, Scott and Jill will think back over the past twenty-six years. The joy and wonder of being a parent.

And they will think of the work the Lord has done in his heart. His profession of faith. His growth in the knowledge of Christ. The times He stood up for Christ. The times he shared his faith with school mates. The short-term missions trip to Vanuatu. His deep love of Christ and the things of Christ. The way his life has been a testimony to the grace of God.

And Scott's chest will puff out a little. And there will be a word to sum up his feelings – pride.

And at this point you might react and say – pride! But, Craig, pride is one of the seven deadly sins.

So I ask you. Is pride always a deadly sin?

No. Pride is wrong when we glory in ourselves, not when our pride is in the work of Christ. We can, indeed we *must*, glory, rejoice and take pride in the power of Christ in the life of others.

You see, while Scott might have prayed and exhorted and taught, any godliness in his son is simply the grace of God. And the glory belongs to God.

And when you see the grace of God displayed in someone you love there is much joy.

Proverbs 15:20:

A wise son makes a father glad.

Proverbs 23:24:

The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice,  
And he who begets a wise son will be glad in him.

And this is also true in the spiritual realm. When we care for someone and we pray and exhort and teach – and we see the hand of God shape them and mould them and make them more like Christ – we rejoice.

And this is very much the case in ministry. A pastor longs for the flock over which the Lord has made him an under-shepherd. There is no greater joy than to see his children in the Lord walking in the truth, finding their joy in Christ, their sufficiency in Christ and knowing the power of Christ.

What a testimony to a watching world.

This is the heart of Paul as he writes his epistle to the Philippians. In Philippians 2:12-18, Paul urges his beloved friends:

*Godly saints are a testimony to the world and a delight to spiritual fathers.*

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To grasp this section, you have to understand that in the life of every Christian there are three people who have a role in us becoming a testimony to the world and a delight to spiritual fathers.

I have called those three – Dads, You and God.

In the passage before us – Philippians 2:12-18 – Paul outlines the role and joys of these three significant people.

*First, the role of Dads.*

*Dads.* I use this as a generic term. It includes all of those who have told us of Christ, urged us along the path of righteousness, encouraged us, warned us, cared for us and prayed for us – Dads, Mums, Grandmas, Pastors, Disciplers, Spouses, Friends.

In every Christian life there are significant people. Parents who loved us and told us of Christ. The friend who led us to the foot of Calvary. The youth pastor who was there when we were heading off the rails. The older man who prayed daily for every child in the church. The husband who led his wife in holiness.

And every one of these men and women have one prayer, one goal, one desire – that Christ would finish the good work that He began in us. That we would continue to drink from the fountains of living water. That we would refuse to depart from the paths of righteousness. That we would find the joy of Christ in its fullness.

And in so doing that we would be a testimony to the world of the power of Christ in the life of a man or woman.

And these people – these spiritual Dads – have a vital role in our lives.

When Scott and Jill's baby is born – Scott is not going to pray a prayer of commitment and then sit back and hope that his precious child becomes a Christian.

He will pray daily for that baby. Teach him God's ways. Encourage him in the paths of righteousness. If he is veering off into dangerous waters – Scott will warn and admonish and encourage. This is the role of a spiritual Dad.

This was Paul's role with the church in Philippi.

In verse 16, Paul speaks of his work among the Philippians as *running* and *toiling*.

Running the race – faithfully carrying out the task of overseeing that church as Apostle to the Gentiles.

Toiling – to the point of exhaustion to see Christ developed in them.

Paul had poured his life, his heart, his sweat into the Philippians.

He arrived in 49 AD. Through his witness, Lydia a wealthy merchant dealing in purple fabrics, the Philippian jailer, their households and probably a few others were miraculously saved and formed the nucleus of this church.

The birth of that church cost him dearly. He was beaten, placed in stocks and imprisoned. He had to face the mob and the magistrate.

Then over the years Paul poured himself into that church. He was in contact with them

He made at least two more visits to Philippi and possibly more.

And now there is a church formed there. It has elders and deacons. It is a witness to the city. It is testimony of the power of Christ to save.

There was a link between this church and the Apostle that was as strong as any human bond. He loved them. He was proud of the work of Christ in them. He desired that Christ finish the work He started in them.

But now, Paul is in prison. Separated from his beloved saints in Philippi. And word comes to him through Epaphroditus about these saints who are so near and dear to his heart.

Some are in prison. Others are suffering. The persecution is fierce.

But the thing that worried him the most was the news that the first cracks of division had begun to appear in the church. Euodia and Syntyche were divided. The Judaisers were undermining the doctrine of salvation by faith alone.

And these divisions might undermine the whole testimony of the church to the city of Philippi.

So Paul takes up his quill and writes. He writes as a father to his children. A spiritual leader to his flock. A Christian who is desperate to see the testimony of Christ in this godless world maintained.

He urges the Philippians to trust the hand of God; to rejoice in the truth of the gospel; to find their life in Christ, to focus on the ultimate triumph of Christ and above all to shine as stars in this dark world.

Paul knows the pressures they are under. The pressure to veer off the path. To respond to persecution with anger. To respond to the temptations of the world in sin. To respond to the pressures of religion by bowing the knee to Nero. To divide over minor issues. To be swayed by every wind of doctrine.

But, Paul knows that in Christ there is sufficiency for any situation. In Christ there is joy.

Paul also knows the extent of his role. He can but run and toil – he can do no more. In the process of growing in Christ – Dads have limited roles. They can share the gospel, they can teach the word, they can exhort to godly living, they can pray. But, this is where their ability to guide and shape ends.

They can't force someone to stay on the path with Christ. By dint of their will they can't get someone to persevere in the faith. They can't force two women who are divided to live in peace. But they can exhort them and pray for them.

In one sense this is so frustrating. Night after night I stand by the beds of my children. I look at these little faces – so peaceful, so serene.

I hear them say their memory verses and sing 'Jesus Loves Me.' I teach them about God. I try to model Christian living. I beg God for their souls. BUT I can't force them into the kingdom. Nor can I force them to be a testimony for Christ.

One of my greatest earthly delights are my kids. But at the back of my mind there is the fear of eighteen years. Of peers and the world. Of lusts and desires. Of prodigal sons and daughters.

Yet all I can do is run and toil. Because there are others involved.

*The Second person involved is You – the individual Christian. What is the role you have in being a testimony to God's grace?*

Paul outlines this clearly. Look at verse 12:

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;



It can be said of the believer, 'he is being saved,' 'he will be saved,' 'he was saved,' 'he is saved.'

The salvation of God includes all of these processes. It begins in eternity past, it has a crisis at the moment when a sinner turns to Christ, it embraces the struggle of sanctification and it culminates when we are glorified in eternity.

So the question for us is, 'What part of the salvation process is Paul speaking of here?'

What is crucial for us to note is that throughout this epistle this very word –         – has been used a number of times.

Look back at verse 19 of chapter 1:

For I know that this will turn out for my *deliverance* through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

The word translated 'deliverance' here is this word –        . It is translated 'salvation' in the King James. But this could not refer to the time when Paul went from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's Son. Paul was already saved in that sense. As I said when we looked at these verses, the best translation is 'vindication.'

Similarly in verse 28 of chapter 1. Again we have our word –         – translated salvation. Again, I said that the better translation is 'vindication.'

Paul's major concern in this epistle has been the testimony of the church.

In Philippians 1:27 he said this:

As those who are citizens of heaven, live your lives worthy of the gospel of Christ.

He then spoke of standing firm with one mind, of suffering for the sake of Christ, of being united in spirit, of being intent on one purpose, of humbling ourselves and regarding others as more important.

The testimony of a united church has been the theme.

And now he pleads:

Work out your vindication with fear and trembling.

'Vindication' is also the best translation of this word in this verse.

Paul knows that the world is looking at us. They have heard our claims that Christ is in us, Christ empowers us, to live is Christ – they want to know if these claims have substance.

Without Christ, Christians *will* give in to persecution. Without Christ they *will* succumb to the temptations of the world. Without Christ they *will* seek self not humility. Without Christ, they *will* divide over trivial matters.

But with Christ – a Christian can do all things through Him who strengthens us.

Consider this conversation between the Macedonian governor and a centurion regarding the Christians in Philippi.

“Well Centurion, have those Christians bowed the knee to Nero yet?”

“No sir, they have not.”

“Well what have you done about it”

“We have imprisoned them. We have tortured them – dipping them in tar and setting them alight, fed them to the lions and cut off their heads.”

“And that hasn’t deterred them?”

“On the contrary, cut one down and three take his place. They rejoice to suffer as their king suffered. They never speak ill of us as we torture them. They sell their worldly possessions to give to those who have none. They love each other more than a father loves his son.

And it gets worse. The people see this and ask, ‘How can men live like this?’ And they answer back, ‘It is not I who live but Christ the Lord who lives in me.’”

“I cannot understand this. Just between you and me Centurion, would you die for Nero?”

“Never.”

“Perhaps there is some truth to their words. Perhaps their God does live in them.”

The early church turned the known world upside down. Not because they were such good evangelists. But because Christ in them the power of God was manifest to a watching world. And the world knew – man alone cannot live like this.

This is Paul’s concern for the Philippians. His concern is for the testimony of the Philippians to a watching world. His concern is that they continue to manifest the power of Christ in their lives.

And Paul knew that division is the surest way to undermine their testimony. When the world sees a church divided, the world will turn from the Lord of the church.

So Paul exhorted them to strive to declare their testimony, their vindication, the display of the power of Christ in them. How? With fear and trembling.

We have just finished several months of *Big Brother* mania. Twelve people locked up in a house surrounded by cameras that enter hundreds of thousands of living rooms.

Since I never watched an episode, I cannot be sure of this – but I suspect that the presence of dozens of cameras – night and day – was a damper on some sins. They restrained themselves because their sin would be beamed to the living rooms of a country. The thought of their grandma watching restrained them.

In one sense Paul makes the same point. The child of God lives out his days before a watching world. We should desire to be a testimony to them because our sin will take the glory from God. We should want to be the greatest testimony of the power and grace of God. We should do everything to avoid shaming the name of Christ.

But, Paul goes further. If that isn't enough, then remember, we live before an ever-watching God. God doesn't need dozens of cameras. He sees every thought and deed. He knows the motives of the heart. This should engender a sense of holy awe and wonder. We should live in fear and trembling.

OK – thus far we have looked at two of the groups of people who have a role in us becoming a testimony to the world and a delight to spiritual fathers.

First, there was the *Dads*. All of those who loved us, prayed for us, exhorted us, warned us and encouraged us.

Then, there was *us*. We have a role. We have to strive to work out our vindication before men and God. We have a mandate to be a testimony to the world.

BUT, and this is a big BUT. If it was up to the Dads and us – we would never make it.

We might have scores of men and women teaching us the way of salvation and helping us along the way. We might strive with all our strength to be holy. But all this effort would never see one man or woman live godly in this world. Because alone, we cannot work out our salvation. Alone we will not be vindicated.

But, here is the grace and mercy of the Lord. He does not merely command us to live godly. He does not merely point the way to live godly. He works effectively in us to make us live godly.

*The third person who has a role in us becoming a testimony to the world and a delight to spiritual fathers is God.*

Look at verse 13:

For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Don't miss this.

Verse 12 – YOU work out your vindication.

Verse 13 – For it is GOD who is working in you.



Taken together these two verses give the balance that is so often lacking.

I'm sure you have heard these statements:

*Let go and let God. And God has done His bit in saving you – now it is up to you to live godly.*

But both are wrong.

*Let go and let God.*

No way! True God is at work – but we don't just let go, we must strive to work out our vindication.

*God has done His bit in saving you – now it is up to you to live godly.*

No way! God doesn't just save us and then leave us. No one can live godly in Christ Jesus unless God is continually working powerfully in us.

The Christian life consists entirely of us striving 100% to live godly in Christ Jesus – and knowing that any godliness that results is 100% the result of God working powerfully in us.

But once again – we run up against a truth that does not sit well with us. Last week we struggled with Jesus who was fully God and fully man. Something our minds cannot grasp.

This week we struggle again. We can understand godliness being up to us. We can understand godliness being up to God. We can even understand it as a joint effort – I do a bit, God does a bit.

What we struggle to comprehend is that we must strive with every fibre of our being to live godly – but the whole effort is powered by God and totally dependant on God.

Nor does this make us mere robots moved along by God.

We are entirely responsible for the state of our lives – yet any holiness is totally God's doing.

And if you find yourself crying, "But it doesn't make any sense!" Then welcome to the club. From the standpoint of human logic – this is incomprehensible. And that is why so many have stumbled here.

But that is OK. It doesn't have to make sense. We just have to accept it.

In one helpful insight Spurgeon said this to his congregation:

God's eternal purposes are accomplished, and yet men remain responsible free agents both in their beginning and in their ending. Do you say that you do not understand how this can be? Neither do I, but I believe it.<sup>2</sup>

Isaiah said it well. Isaiah 55:8-9:

“My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.  
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

If we could understand all the mysteries of God, He would not be God.

The point is that if it were up to the Dads and us – we would fail. We would be a terrible testimony to the world. But it is not up to us. God wants us to be shining lights – trophies of grace – living testimonies. So He works powerfully among us to mould us into a precious testimony to a watching world. He supplies both the will to live godly and the power to live godly.

And the result is – for His good pleasure. It is the plan of God that He call sinners like you and me, save us, transform us and display us as trophies of grace.

And that is why in verse 14, Paul urges once again:

Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

As Paul has pointed out again and again – for us to grumble against each other and to dispute and argue with each other – this is the surest way to destroy the testimony of the church.

Pride and selfishness finally destroy every human group. Bob Tucker is taking forty-three members of the Liberal executive to court over preselection. Bob Katter splits from the National Party under acrimonious circumstances. Are we surprised? No! I don't care if it is the bowls club, the P&C, marriages – they all suffer from grumbling and disputing.

But with Christ in us – we *can* live in the church in peace. We *can* accept each other. We *can* consider others more important than ourself. We *can* be the testimony the Lord calls us to be.

And what do these trophies of grace look like? Verses 15-16:

So that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life.

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in Curnow, Hulse, Kingdon and Thomas, *A Marvelous Ministry* (Ligonier, Soli Deo Gloria, 1993) p. 58.

When we strive for vindication, holiness, Christlikeness. When this effort is powered by God. The result is that we are blameless and innocent. Above reproach.

The world looks at us and they don't see the self-seeking, corrupt, worldly humans they see everywhere else. So different to the crooked and perverse generation that makes up the world.

In the Epistle to Diognetus, an anonymous second-century author gave his observation of Christians:

They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass all the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners. And are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.

This unbeliever looked on and saw a group that he could only marvel at – a group he had to label as blameless, innocent, above reproach.

And in this they appeared as lights in the world.

The literal translation is:

Among whom you shine as stars in the world.

What a wonderful picture. Christ in us makes us so different, so glories that in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation – these God empowered saints shine as stars to the glory of the Lord.

These saints hold fast the word of life – for the word is their hope, their power, their life.

Note what happens when the church shines as stars in the midst of a dark world.

*First*, we are a testimony to the world. We stand out in this perverse generation.

*Second*, we are a delight to God. We give glory to the One who transformed us.

*Third*, we are a delight to the spiritual Dads. Verses 16 and 17:

So that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.

When you shine as stars – Paul says, I have reason to glory. I toiled and ran – but it was not in vain. God worked powerfully in you and the whole world knows that.

I can die a happy man. If my imprisonment should end in death, if my life is poured out – your faith and service mean I have not run in vain. I rejoice. You have gladdened my heart. And I want you to know this. I share my joy with you.

One of the greatest earthly joys is to see those you love, those you poured your life into – shining as stars to the glory of Christ.

*Fourth*, we can rejoice that our lives can impact this world. Verse 18:

You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

When we know the power of God in our lives – making us what we could never be. Transforming us into a powerful testimony of the God who saves. In this we can rejoice. Not that we did it. But that we strived to be a testimony and God worked in us and He did it.

Pride is not always wrong. When the pride is in the work God does in a saint – it is a source of great joy.

When we are lights shining in the world. The world takes note. God delights in us. The spiritual Dads delight in us. And we can rejoice at the power of Christ.

Do you want to experience delight in this world? Then pour yourself into others and know delight. And become shining stars and know delight.

How can we best impact this world? How can we show our love for Christ?

Paul tells us. Carve your name on hearts not marble. Live godly by the power of Christ. Let this world know what our glorious Christ can do in the hearts of men and women like you and me. With the power of God we can shine as stars in the midst of a perverse generation – to the glory of Christ.